

- ☑ We're world beaters for Galaxy launches (back)
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- ☑ On June 23, 1931, aviators Wiley Post and Harold Gatty took off from New York City on the first around the world flight in a single-engine plane.

Security Police had boots in dirt on road to Baghdad

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

One night in a hole in the ground is all you need to know that the real face of war is still about boots in the dirt.

Thirteen Westover security specialists who dug fighting positions in the desert, laid in them through night after night in body armor with M-16s and 203 grenade launchers, squad automatic weapons and grenades at hand, who watched a barren landscape for enemy movement and listened to firefights learned early that the road to Baghdad was a rough one.

The security specialists, led by TSgt. Shane Stabile, recently returned home from Iraq. Iraqi Freedom was for them long nights, sandstorms, short rations, unexploded ordinance all over the ground, eyes red from fatigue and uncertainty. It was the tension of setting up a firebase in the desert with the enemy close enough that at night you could hear them hit Army checkpoints and listen to the situation report on the radio. It was close enough to the front that they helped move injured on the airstrip.

The Patriot Wing team experienced a combat situation unique for Air Force security specialists since the Vietnam War. They were fully loaded with combat gear and dug in at a bare base in hostile territory. The security specialists rode the first C-130 into Bushmaster LZ, a dirt airstrip that had just



TOUGH DUTY -- SrA. Aaron Lombardino takes stock of the empty desert base where security police lived in fighting positions.

--photo by TSgt. Shane Stabile

VISITING THE TIN MAN -- Westover's security police team in Baghdad gets together for a remembrance photo around a statue of the man they helped drive out of power.



been passed by the 3rd Infantry Division on its long push north through Iraq.

Bushmaster LZ was nothing more than a temporary dirt airstrip near Karbala, scene of hard fighting by the "Rock of the Marne" Third Division. The fighting had moved north toward Baghdad when Westover and Dover security specialists arrived on the first Hercules. Until Baghdad fell the airfield served as a supply point for the front and a waypoint for those returning.

Stepping off the plane they set up their M-60s in fighting positions as the inner ring of defense. Further out were Army checkpoints which were hit by Iraqis.

The soldiers were veterans of the battle to take Karbala, a fight so tough it left widespread destruction. "They talked about that place. That had a big impact on them, the hardest impact," Stabile said.

For five days the security specialists mostly lived in holes. With two up, two down at night, a few hours sleep was all they got. The desert would be in the 100s during the day and at night they'd wrap themselves in sleeping bags to get warm.

When not on the perimeter, the security specialists helped on the flight line, carrying injured and supplies. Supplies, including MREs and water, were always short and had to be carefully conserved.

The only contact they had with Iraqis was shooing away nomads with goat herds. The Iraqis were friendly, knowing enough English to offer "down with Saddam" and

seeking to barter cigarettes or dinars, the national currency. "It definitely made you appreciate the American way of life. Kids were running around with bare feet in the middle of the desert," Stabile said.

One day they were told to pack up, Baghdad had been liberated and Saddam International Airport was open. The word came one day too late to avoid a four-day sandstorm that knocked down tents and kept them in sleeping bags, poncho liners and goggles. By the time they re-deployed to a built-up base near Iraq, one member needed antibiotics to counter the sand in his lungs.

Soon after leaving Iraq, the team was hand picked, based on performance and experience at Bushmaster LZ, to fly to provide security at the renamed Baghdad International Airport.

After two days of cleaning and repacking gear, they were on a C-130.

When they came off the plane in Baghdad there were still firefights. They stayed in a building nicknamed the "crack house" for its filthy condition. At night from the roof they could hear firefights. They saw the red tracers of the 3rd ID crisscross with the green tracers of the Iraqis. One time the airfield was mortared.

"The wild, wild west," is how Stabile describes those early weeks after the liberation. "Probably for the first two weeks there were continuous firefights....it was

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lawless," he said.

"The runways were the only things actually cleared. There were RPGs and weapons laying everywhere. There were rocket launchers. The Iraqi soldiers just left their fighting positions. There was so much, EOD couldn't get it all. We were constantly picking up AK-47s. Piles 10 feet high were spilling over," Stabile said.

Their job was to guard the side of the airport allocated to civilian and humanitarian aircraft. They teamed up with the Army, but to a large extent the Westover security police were an autonomous unit. Highlights included working with Australian security forces and patrolling in a Mercedes which had been given them by soldiers. Several times they apprehended Iraqis who had most likely intruded to loot.

As at Bushmaster, MREs were in short supply. The 3rd ID soldiers were eager to trade for tobacco. It was a real treat when an aircrew brought in some frozen chicken from Germany. People lost weight because they got tired of eating MREs.

Gradually, conditions improved. Shooting tapered off, although there were still pinpoint attacks taking place when they left. The quality of life improved with tents and hot meals.

The security specialists visited with the 11-member 439th Airlift Control Flight and two intel specialists at the airport. They even got enough time off to tour one of Saddam's palaces, furnished in marble, complete with moat. A washing machine pulled from a bombed out building added to the quality of life. They set up their own electricity. Life was almost becoming comfortable, with an air conditioner and refrigerator, when they got their orders home.

Those on the team were: TSgt. Edward Plant, SSgt. Brian Shameklis, SSgt. Russell Hedges, SSgt. Pablo Rodriguez, SSgt. Ronnie Briere, SSgt. Brian Coutre, SSgt. Joseph Ilsley, SrA. Michael Dupell, SrA. Aaron Lombardino, SrA. Christopher Beaulieu, SrA. Eric Marjault and A1C Benjamin Kovacevic.



ONE MORE FOR THE CORPS -- Marines of Marine Air Support Squadron 6 mark their homecoming from combat with a group photo in front of their Eagle, Globe and Anchor flag at their Westover headquarters. They were recently welcomed home after three months in the Iraqi Freedom AOR, during which they were attached to the 7th, 11th and 5th Marines and British forces to coordinate air strikes, medevacs and other air support in the drive to free Iraq. (L-R), Capt. Ryan Walker, Sgt. Roger Allen, CWO4 William Bartlett, Cpl. Richard Marsh Jr., Sgt. Kevin Cook, (hidden below the eagle, SSgt. Nathan Brock), Maj. John Brodrick, Sgt. Carlton Hill, Sgt. Matthew Gomez, (in rear, Maj. Cary Schorsch), SSgt. Dennis McCarthy, GySgt. John Hammond. Not shown: Sgt. John Bacon, SSgt. Adam Ayriess, Sgt. Matthew Biering, SSgt. Eric Frazier and Cpl. Kevin Hildenbrandt.

We're world beaters for Galaxy launches

A total of 1,103 C-5 launches makes Westover number one for C-5 launches in the world, according to record-keeping up to May 31.

From the start of the Iraqi Freedom surge on Feb. 2 up to May 31, the Patriot Wing had one more Galaxy launch than Moron AB, Spain which clocked 1,102.

At 80.8 percent, our maintenance reliability rate is higher or comparable to almost all bases. The only exception is the 90.9 maintenance reliability rate achieved by Travis AFB, Calif., with far fewer launches at 462.

The number of launches for other bases up to May 31 were: Rota NAS, Spain, 1,035; Dover AFB, Del., 922; Stewart ANGB, N.Y., 142; and Lackland AFB, Texas, 133.

Up to June 14, there was a total of 9,046 C-5 launches in the United States and 4,703 C-5 launches overseas. Galaxies have launched from 212 different locations -- 125 in the United States and 87 overseas.

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003

8,009 passengers -- 2,640 aircraft
30,252,637 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

16,296 hot meals served
Box lunches: 5,051
Info from MSgt. David Beauregard, 439SVS

Fuel since Feb.1
17,730,908 gallons of JP-8
Info from Jim Maloney, Fuels

PATRIOT express

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using deploying reservist's last names)

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Express-ions

